



February 24, 2015

TO: Appropriations Committee
FROM: E. Carol Polifroni

I planned to speak with you at tonight's public hearing, however, I now have no voice and thus am submitting my testimony in writing. I am Carol Polifroni, a professor of Nursing, Director of the Office of Public Engagement and Chair of the Senate Executive Committee of the University Senate. The university senate, a multi-disciplinary body representing faculty and staff is the governing voice of the faculty and staff.

I have worked at UConn for forty years and bore witness to the changes over time as a result of the state's investment in UConn: phenomenal infrastructure improvement and growth, the increase in the quality of education, the major steps toward the fulfillment of our research mission and potential, and the increased service to the citizens of our state through interactive pedagogy. In my years prior to retirement, I do not desire to bear witness to a decline of all the promise nor do you. It seems ironic that as UConn is increasingly successful, the state block grant declines. This paradox needs to stop before substantive damage is done.

I appreciate everything you have done for the University of Connecticut and I understand the challenges you face in reducing the budget deficit. However, the recommended budget released last week creates a gap of approximately \$40 million between the state funding and what is needed to operate the university next year.

A reduction to the appropriation in that amount would without question have a devastating impact on all aspects of the university of which two I will address here. My research work has been dedicated to increasing the diversity of the nursing workforce. In order to diversify the nursing workforce so that it mirrors the people we care for who are the citizens and residents of Connecticut, the evidence based practices put into place in the School of Nursing in recent years need to be continued. We know that students of diversity frequently come from backgrounds without the necessary educational background for success at the collegiate level. We also know that the draw of the culture and the family is great. Thus, programs are needed to assist with professional socialization, to assist with addressing the achievement gap and to help with the development of resiliency and a culture of success. If the proposed budget is enacted, these programs known to be beneficial and successful will be reduced as I and others will have increased teaching loads and less, if any, time for these activities. The learning community I run

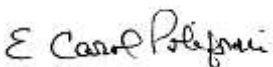
is evidence based and has had a 100% record of collegiate graduation. The workforce is more diverse because of these activities and funding so that I and others can continue this work for our state's healthcare workforce is essential.

In regard to engagement, when dollars are cut to foster interactive pedagogies such as service learning, or dollar limited so that we are not engaged in problem solving with our communities in relevant, responsible and reciprocal ways, not only do our students suffer but so do our communities. Investing in engagement, a part of the UConn mission, is key to the fulfilling the promise for our communities. In recent years UConn has become increasingly involved with our local communities knowing that their real problems can serve as excellent educational content for our students. The partnerships formed are win wins as cities and municipalities receive the benefit of the expertise of our students, faculty and staff *and* the same students, faculty and staff are working with real life issues rather than those contrived or reported in textbooks. Consequently, students spend less funds on textbooks as they are immersed in the cities' data helping them address the matter at hand. This type of learning takes time, dedicated resources, innovative faculty and much coordination. If funding is cut to the proposed levels, faculty will need to resort to the standard classroom approach which is known to be less effective than these innovative teaching strategies of engagement.

I appreciate that you have choices to make. As a nurse, I understand the need for social services and for health care. However, I also understand that if we do not invest in quality education and opportunity for research with today's students and faculty, the problems in social service and health care will be compounded. Your investment in UConn is not solely about UConn but about the preferred future for Connecticut. Greater than 85% of UConn School of Nursing graduates remain in Connecticut. This is true for many other disciplines as well. You are investing in the state, in *all* its activities, when you invest in UConn.

I cannot stress the negative consequences of this proposed budget enough. The effect on our students, our academic programs and the role UConn will play in the state's future, economic and otherwise is devastating. Will UConn manage with the proposed budget...of course. Is it the way we should be doing business in Connecticut...no! If you want the flagship university of the state of Connecticut to have state of the art pedagogical practices, innovative interdisciplinary research to address social problems, and investment of educationally and experientially qualified human resources in our cities and municipalities, then restore the budget to UConn so we can fulfill the promise of excellence.

I appreciate your time and am pleased to provide greater detail or share other ideas at any time.



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